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ABSTRACT

Southwest Missouri State University and The Literacy Connection developed a joint proposal to seek funds for the creation of a literacy corps in the Ozarks. The project determined that 92,000 southwest Missourians are functionally illiterate. The university provides coursework for student volunteer tutors. Student coordinators have been hired to recruit, supervise, and evaluate the work of tutors at community agencies. In addition, student coordinators have developed and implemented weekly volunteer reporting provisions of students' attendance and their progress. Volunteers receive course credit for providing 6 hours of tutoring each week. They are also expected to learn and understand the needs of the people they serve. Instructional training materials produced by Literacy Volunteers of America have been purchased for tutors and clients. Students receive coursework on literacy and on teaching methods. The project will be evaluated by determining the number of tutors enrolled in class, the number of hours served per week, course offerings, and program accomplishment. This project should develop a corps of well-trained tutors in community agencies, introduce undergraduates to the needs and problems of illiterate adults, and provide an incentive to volunteer in the form of academic credit for undergraduates. (KC)

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Student Literacy Corps in the Ozarks

Lawrence M. Kenney and Sally Scheid

Background:

Fifty-eight million Americans over the age of 18 have difficulties reading for everyday survival. America ranks 49th in literacy among the 159 countries of the world (Burger and Kennedy, 1987-88). Illiterates represent a lost resource in human potential and in tax dollars - - both not realized income as well as dollars spent on welfare, prison, remedial education and incompetent job performance. Total spending on illiteracy in the United States reaches only about four percent of those who need help. The National Advisory Council on Adult Education estimates that five billion dollars would be needed to impact the illiteracy problem through educational coursework. These, indeed, are grim statistics.

To combat illiteracy, a bill, initially introduced in April 1987 by Senators Kennedy, Simon, Harkin, and Mikulski, proposed the launching of a Literacy Corps at a thousand colleges and universities in our nation; grants of about $25,000 per institution would cover the initial administrative costs of these campus programs. While this particular bill died on its own, it became attached to a trade legislation bill, Public Law 100-418, the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness

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Act of 1988, which was signed by President Reagan on August 23, 1988.

Provisions of Public Law 100-418

Awards are made to institutions of higher education where volunteer undergraduates will serve as unpaid literacy tutors in public community agencies. These awards, up to but not exceeding $25,000 for each of two years, include evaluation and stipends for student coordinators. Funds may not be used for the payment of stipends or salaries to tutors. Tutors are defined as those undergraduates taking a training course for which academic credit is granted by the institution as approved by the Secretary for Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education. Therefore, institutions receiving awards must provide academic credit to undergraduates for the course and its related field work (tutoring a client 6 clock hours weekly). Moreover, the tutoring in literacy must be done at a community agency that provides assistance to educationally or economically disadvantaged individuals.

Project for the Ozarks:

As a public university, Southwest Missouri State University is committed to extend educational opportunities throughout southwest Missouri and the state, to preserve

and advance knowledge about the region's social and cultural heritage, and to provide research and consulting services to various agencies, businesses, individuals, institutions and organizations nationwide. The University has a continuing responsibility, based on its heritage as a teacher training institution, to prepare teachers in the region. Hence, the University strives to develop mutually beneficial relationships between the insitution and local publics by using the community as a laboratory for teaching and learning, and by structuring research and service to meet community needs.

Southwest Missouri State University works with The Literacy Connection, a nonprofit Missouri corporation, whose mission is to enable adult citizens of southwest Missouri to acquire the essential basic skills of reading and writing; to improve their adults' economic conditions and self-confidence; and, to help them gain and/or maintain a larger degree of control over their lives. The Connection has the technical expertise of volunteer coordination, knowledge of community agencies, and access to basic skills' trainers to work with student tutors. Through member organizations, The Literacy Connection can assist tutors and coordinators to find resources for the host of other social problems often occurring in concert with literacy deficits.

These two forces, then, the University and The

Literacy Connection, developed a joint proposal seeking funds for the creation of a literacy corps in the Ozarks. To demonstrate need for the project, The Literacy Connection determined that an estimated 92,000 southwest Missourians are functionally illiterate. The Governor's Report indicated that about 365,000 Missourians have illiteracy problems. Among the 24 Ozark counties, illiteracy rates exceed by several percentage points the state's average of 11%. It seemed incumbent on the university, as an educational leader, to become involved in crafting solutions for illiteracy. There is a tremendous shortage of volunteers in literacy programs and it became apparent that university faculty and undergraduate students represented an untapped resource. Furthermore, community involvement seems to bring the problem of illiteracy closer to home; experiences working with illiterate individuals emphasize the importance to undergraduates of language skills for everyone. Additionally, undergraduate students should benefit from opportunities to combine their studies, two sequential methods courses dealing with teaching the adult how to read, with their volunteer experiences. These students should learn the needs of the people in the communities in which they live and they should form a responsible attitude toward their role in solving those problems.

Plan in Action:

Southwest Missouri State University is currently providing the required coursework for the student volunteer tutors. Student coordinators have been hired to recruit, supervise and evaluate the work of tutors at community agencies. In addition, student coordinators have developed and implemented weekly volunteer reporting provisions of students' attendance and their progress twice each semester.

The Literacy Connection, on the other hand, is taking responsibility for training student coordinators and for selecting, with the University, the community literacy sites such as the developmentally handicapped center, the homeless shelter, and the juvenille farm for non-violent offenders. The student coordinator is a master's degree candidate in the University's graduate reading program so that the training mainly consists of making the coordinator aware of the federal guidelines, scheduling preferences, lesson plan format and reporting forms for indicating clients' progress. The Literacy Connection assists the coordinator in placing tutors and provides occasional staff visits to observe the coordinator at work. In the methods course, time is reserved each week for a tutor to report on her client: background information, instructional level, strengths, interests, weaknesses, methods and materials. Class members are encouraged to ask questions and to offer recommendations to the tutor

reporting.

By combining the Student Literacy Corps with the resource of The Literacy Connection, Southwest Missouri State University is able to enhance, not compete with or duplicate, the programs of existing agencies. The Connection assists member providers with volunteer recruitment, public awareness and resource development. This project complements those efforts and relieves University faculty from the technical volunteer details. The Connection is in an unique position to provide these services for SMSU because of its presence in the 24-county area of southwest Missouri covering the region served by the University.

Student coordinators were recruited and hired through the Campus Cooperative Education Office. These coordinators work with the University and The Literacy Connection to recruit, screen and place tutors; supervise their assignments; assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses; and, report tutor and student progress. They are hired for 15 hours per week each semester and are required to attend the classes of the training course in addition to their schedules. In short, the job of the student coordinator is to serve as the link between undergraduate tutors, the University and the community agencies through The Literacy Connection.

The funds of the grant are being used to pay personnel costs, training costs and travel expenses. Monies are also used to purchase supplies, to meet printing costs, and to pay telecommunication expenses. Instructional and training materials produced by Literacy Volunteers of America have been purchased for tutors and clients.

Course Content:

Students enrolled in the first methods course view videos produced by the Literacy Volunteers of America. These tapes are referred to by LVA as the Basic Reading Tutor Workshop. As a result, student volunteers learn to assess reading compentency; teach using language experience, sight words, context clues, phonics and word patterns; emphasize comprehension from the beginning; help clients set goals; and, plan lessons according to a client's goals and needs. A tutor handbook summarizes the workshop information for each student volunteer.

The course instructor supplements this core material through lectures, demonstrations and class discussions. Role playing in class is used extensively.

For additional theoretical background, the text, Adult Literacy Perspectives, is used. The following outline has been prepared utilizing a major portion of this text:

I. Historical and Philosophical Perspectives
   A. Definition and Evolution of Concepts
   B. Chronology of Main Literacy Events
   C. Language Experience Approach
   D. A Historical View of Literacy

II. Dimensions of Adult Illiteracy
   A. Selected Case Studies of Illiterates
   B. ABE Programs
   C. Current Needs

III. Program Planning
   A. Developing Curriculum
   B. Approaches for Adult Beginning Readers
   C. The Role of the Computer
   D. Life Skills

IV. Assessment in Adult Basic Education
   A. Useful Tests
   B. Informal Means

V. Remedial Approaches

VI. Setting in Education
   A. Adult Basic Education in Prison
   B. Adult Basic Education in the Workplace
   C. Adult Basic Education in the Community

All clients have been placed in LVA's Read On! II series. These leveled books emphasize reading and writing, offer interesting material to an adult, provide independent learner preview and practice and expand vocabulary. For

the tutor, these materials provide step - by - step instructions and lesson plans and show the tutor how to apply the process to learner - selected material, whether LVA's, other commercial reading books, or teacher - made reading materials.

Applications for Grants:

Institutions desiring to receive a grant must submit an application to the Secretary of Education giving assurances that the institution will use the grant to cover the institution's costs of participation, stipends to the student coordinators and costs of technical assistance, including the collection and dissemination of information and evaluation. The institution must establish one or more courses of instruction for academic credit which are dsigned to combine the training of undergraduate students in various academic departments with experience as tutors. Students are required, as a condition of receiving credit, to perform not less than 6 hours of voluntary, uncompensated service each week of the academic term in a public commmunity agency as a tutor. This tutoring must be supplementary to the existing instructional services, offered in a structured classroom setting, and furnished under qualified personnel. The institution must locate tutoring services in one or more public community agencies which

serve educationally or economically disadvantaged individuals; the institution must also demonstrate that it has participated previously in community service activities.

Evaluation:

This project will be evaluated by determining the number of tutors enrolled in class. The number of hours served per week will be closely monitored by student coordinators on a weekly basis. Meeting the minimum requirements will be used as a determinant in satisfactory completion of the course. Records of course offerings will be monitored and maintained. Questionnaires will be administered to agency staff, student coordinators, tutors, and participants regarding training, program accomplishments, and supervision.

Conclusion:

This project, and others of its kind, should develop a corps of well-trained tutors in commmunity agencies, introduce undergraduates to the needs and problems of the illiterate adult, and provide an incentive in the form of academic credit for undergraduates to volunteer - - an experience that will hopefully become a lifetime affair. Young Americans of the 1990's serving in the Literacy Corps reflect a dedicated

idealism and commitment to public service as their parents had in the 1960's at the initiation of President Kennedy's Peace Corps.

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Dr. Kenney is director of developmental studies and he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in reading, including coursework for the Student Literacy Corps at Southwest Missouri State University. He is a member of the Executive Planning Committee of the Missouri Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services and its Delegate Selection Committee. He chairs the IRA special interest group, Professors of Reading Teacher Educators, and is editor - elect of that group's journal, The Reading Professor. He will be leading a studytour to Australia and New Zealand this year and doing a presentation at the South Pacific Reading Conference in Rotorua. IRA recently commended Dr. Kenney for his outstanding service through reading activities in Missouri.

Ms. Sally Scheid is the director of The Literacy Connection, Springfield, Mo. She holds a M.A. degree in the Administration of Nonprofit Organizations. For over twenty-five years, Ms. Scheid has been employed by volunteer organizations as either an administrator or fund raiser.